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HOWARD MAY HAVE GIVEN SOVIETS "WEALTH OF DETAIL," EX-OFFICIAL SAYS
BY JOAN MOWER
WASHINGTON

Accused spy Edward L. Howard probably provided the Soviet Union with much detail about American intelligence activities and his defection may have dealt U.S. operations a "loss of major magnitude," a former CIA official said today.

George Carver, a senior analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Howard would have known some names of CIA people in Moscow as well as techniques used there when he first sold secrets nearly two years ago. Carver is a former deputy CIA director for national intelligence.

Howard was granted political asylum in the Soviet Union today, Izvestia, the government newspaper said.

CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson said she could not confirm or deny the report from Moscow.

"What I am told is that he is a fugitive from justice," she said.

The agency declined to comment on what damage Howard's defection might pose to U.S. intelligence interests.

"He was on deck for Moscow," said Carver, noting that Howard likely would have had access to some training manuals. "To my knowledge, he is the first to go directly to the Soviets with a wealth of detail." The consequent damage to the agency was probably a "loss of major magnitude," he said, speculating that "the damage has to have been serious ... He was a professional staff officer." Howard, fired from the CIA in 1983 after a polygraph test suggested he had used illegal drugs and engaged in petty theft, had been trained to go to Moscow as a junior level spy at the U.S. Embassy.

But he was pulled off the assignment and left the agency shortly afterwards. Two years later, he was charged with spying for the Soviets, but fled the United States before he was arrested.

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Last month, the Washington Post quoted unidentified as saying Howard is "the worst intelligence loss in years." After leaving the CIA in 1983, Howard went to New Mexico where he worked as a \$32,000-a-year analyst for the state's Legislative Finance Committee.

U.S. officials charge that he left the CIA he sold secrets to Soviet KGB officials in Austria in September 1984. He was reportedly paid \$6,000.

Howard, who left a wife and young child when he eluded FBI agents and skipped the country last year, was identified as a spy by Vitaly Yurchenko, a Soviet official who defected to the United States.

Yurchenko later went back to the Soviet Union, embarrassing the CIA which had touted his initial defection as an intelligence coup.

Details about the specific damage done by Howard to U.S. operations in Moscow are hazy.

For instance, government sources reported last year that the United States recently lost contact with a Soviet citizen in Moscow who had long provided valuable information about high-technology electronics and aviation research.

It is unclear whether there was a link between Howard and the loss of the contact.

The Washington Post reported on July 18 that at least five American officials have been caught spying in Moscow since Howard defected.

The Howard case prompted rancor and finger-pointing between the CIA, which is responsible for hiring Howard in the first place, and the FBI which has jurisdiction over domestic counter-intelligence activities to root out Soviet operatives operating on American soil.

The Los Angeles Times said in June that a highly classified report blamed both agencies for mishandling the case.

The report criticized the CIA for its hiring, screening and firing of Howard, while the FBI came under criticism for failing to pursue the Howard case with vigor and for letting him slip from its watch, the newspaper said.